

(b) (2)—*Protection from Fire.*

40. The results of the year's fire protection as compared with those of 1893-94 are as follows:—

No.	Division.	Forest Area placed under protection against Fire.		Average burned.		Percentage burned.	
		1893-94.	1894-95.	1893-94.	1894-95.	1893-94.	1894-95.
		Acrès.	Acrès.	Acrès.	Acrès.	Acrès.	Acrès.
1	East Thána ...	451,907	440,207	17,700	26,448	3.9	6
2	West Thána ...	247,344	323,021	6,680	3,706	2.7	1.1
3	Surat ...	478,237	478,873	443,747	448,614	92.8	93.6
4	Panch Maháls ...	217,530	213,530	17,276	20,311	7.9	9.5
	Total ...	1,391,018	1,455,631	485,403	499,079	34.9	34.2

Thána.

41. In West Thána there has been an immense improvement in the percentage of area burnt over, but in East Thána this percentage is even higher than last year. Although the Divisional Forest Officer claims that the increased area shown as burnt is due to correcter reporting, yet after making all allowances it is clear that there has been no improvement. This question of fire protection is a most grave one in Thána. The "coupe" system, as it is popularly called under which the Thána Forests are being worked, is in most ways a complete success. The people are furnished with raw-material and a livelihood, and the revenue remains at a high figure; moreover, the coppice shoots from stools felled promise a fair crop for the next revolution, but it cannot be overlooked that there is a great dearth—too often a total absence—of seedlings to replace the present stools when their reproductive power shall be exhausted. There can be no doubt that mainly, if not entirely, this is due to forest fires. The reserves, especially the areas which have come under the axe during the past 10 years, were fire-traced as usual, but in most instances the only use these traces served was to prevent the fire spreading beyond the limits of the reserves. The fact is, fires only very exceptionally enter the forests from outside, they are almost always kindled inside. In East Thána out of 131 fires no less than 123 commenced inside the reserves. These figures are suggestive, but still more so is the fact that the whole of the Tánsa catchment area was burnt from end to end by fires which invariably commenced within it although there is no one living there. The system of reporting each fire by post-card to the Collector as initiated by Mr. Sinclair has been continued with the modification that the post-card is sent to the Assistant Collector of the sub-division instead of to the Collector. All the Assistant Collectors appealed to state that the system is a useful one, but I confess I cannot concur. In the first year possibly the village officers were startled at being asked about fires, but as soon as they realized that that was all, the system, I fear, 'degenerated into' routine, and has become absolutely harmful as giving an idea that something real is being done, whereas it is not so. The Forest Department have done their best and, I think, I may confidently assert that an immense improvement has been effected; but it would seem that we have reached the best possible which is achievable by us under present conditions, and I have no hesitation in saying it is very far short of what must be achieved if the present working-plans are to be anything more than a trap. The vitality of the present stools may last out two or even three revolutions, but unless seedlings are produced to replace them as they fail, the ultimate result must be denudation. The present subordinate establishment is admittedly short-handed and it is possible that an improvement may be obtained by supplementing it by a temporary fire protection establishment. It is proposed to try the experiment this year, but I cannot conscientiously state that I have any confidence in its success. Under existing orders the people under one excuse or another have the right to wander unchallenged where they will and, under these conditions, prevention becomes an impossibility with any establishment that we should be justified in employing. I am aware that

it has been urged that forests are too often fired on purpose as a protest against the curtailment of privileges in them, but I confess I cannot believe this. The larger proportion of fires, I think, are, no doubt, purposely started, but the object is either to destroy the cover for wild animals which springs up and continues for 4 or 5 years after a coupe has been made, or in connection with shikár. I am in hopes of inducing the Collector to withdraw all gun licenses within a certain area round every fire that occurs, and this may have some effect; but I fear that unless Government enforce communal responsibility, no real improvement can be hoped for much beyond the point which we have reached. And even this communal responsibility must be one that really touches all the members of the village. Withdrawing the right of grazing, even if it could be enforced, does not touch the Thákur or Kátkari who fires the forests to drive out a sounder of pig to his Náik who waits for them with his matchlock.

Surat.

42. In the Dángs practically every acre was burnt over, and until forest reserves are placed on a firmer footing, it is absolutely hopeless to fight against this state of affairs which is and has been the normal one in the Dángs for very many years. Until the demarcation has been given full effect to I can hold out little hope of improvement. The executive establishment for some 800 square miles is about 25 men all told. An effort has been made during the last 2 years to protect one or two small areas, of a few thousand acres in all, as an object lesson, by giving turbans to the local Náiks and Patels when fire has been kept out and has been fairly successful.

43. In Surat proper the forests of the Mándvi Range, which are similar to those in the Dángs, are alone liable to be burnt. These, notwithstanding the figures annually reported, have undoubtedly been almost completely overrun by fire year after year. The areas burnt have been notoriously under-estimated, even last year when special attention was given to this matter the area was only given as 11,000 acres. During the past season Mr. Wallinger gave his special attention to the work of fire protection. The Mándvi forests consist of (1) a large block at the east end of the range, comprising the whole lands of some 12 deserted villages, which is bounded on two sides by Gáikwári territory, and of (2) a number of smaller reserves scattered over the rest of the range. Amongst these smaller reserves at distances of 12 miles or so apart Forest Posts have been built and, at the commencement of the season, a 'Nagára' or large drum was hung up at each of these posts. The arrangement proved most successful. In one case, which came under my observation within half an hour of the beating of the drum, the Divisional Forest Officer, the Assistant Collector, Mr. Wood, I. C. S., and some 40 villagers were at the scene of the fire which was about three miles off, and the fire was got under almost at once. No such system, however, was possible in the large block, which has been annually burnt by fires crossing over the Gáikwári border. Here a fire trace 40 feet wide was cleared of every living thing and was then kept clear of dead leaves, &c., by patrols entertained for the purpose. This trace was 12 miles long and, when I visited it early in March, I found a fire had just reached it from Gáikwári territory but had been successfully stopped. This was evidently the second fire which had traversed the Gáikwári area, the second feeding on the dead leaves which had fallen and the grass and bamboos which had died since the occurrence of the first fire. Unfortunately it is difficult to get labour and it was found impossible to complete the trace along the whole frontier, with the result that though fire after fire was kept back, yet in May three fires got into the reserve over the untraced portion, and these three fires alone are responsible for no less than 10,500 of the total of 16,500 acres burnt over in this Range during the year. The fact is that this reserve, which has been practically unworked for many years, has become so choked with heavy grass that it was impossible to stop a fire which had once got a hold. It is hoped that the system of fire lines for this reserve will be completed this season. Mr. Wallinger is deserving of sympathy for the unfavourable result I am obliged to record, for he worked very hard and it was only I believe the impossibility of completing the system of traces which prevented his being almost completely successful.

44. I cannot pass on without recording my thanks to Mr. Wood, I.C.S., for the hearty moral support and even personal help in extinguishing fires which he gave to Mr. Wallinger.

Panch Maha'ls.

45. The figures in this division show a higher percentage of area burnt over than last year, and Mr. Stewart records that he considers even this area to be under-estimated. The Divisional Forest Officer attributes the poor results of fire protection to want of funds for fire tracing work and the entertainment of special patrols. I think, however, this cannot be the only cause, for barely one-fourth of the sum provided was actually spent. The fact is, the demarcation and settlement of the forests of the division have only lately been completed, and organization only lately taken in hand. The forests are on flat ground, and protection should not be difficult but can only be successful if methodically undertaken. Mr. Wallinger, who has taken charge of the division, will no doubt make a commencement in the coming season. I would note, however, that the support of the Magistrates is necessary for success. During the season two convictions were obtained in which fines of Re. 1 were inflicted by the Magistrate.

(b) (3).—Regulation of Grazing and Protection from Cattle.

46. The following statement gives details of cattle impounded during the year under report :—

No.	Division.	From open Forests.		From closed Forests.		Total.	
		1893-94.	1894-95.	1893-94.	1894-95.	1893-94.	1894-95.
1	East Thána	230	154	2,086	1,922	2,316	2,076
2	West Thána	161	351	1,280	1,750	1,441	2,101
3	Surat	1,070	1,055	1,869	1,359	2,939	2,414
4	Panch Maháls	661	1,111	1,980	2,837	2,641	3,948
	Total	2,122	2,671	7,215	7,868	9,337	10,539

It will be seen that the numbers differ but slightly from those of last year.

47. The grazing regulations were in force in the Panch Maháls and Surat (exclusive of the Dángs), but only in certain selected ranges of the 2 Thána divisions. The number of cattle impounded in Thána bears no proportion to the number which were allowed to graze illicitly in coupes, as I can bear witness from the damage which came under my notice during my tour; but pounds are so far apart and the establishment so short-handed, that no doubt the impounding of trespassing cattle, at all times a difficult task, is shirked.

Fencing.

48. No new fencing was undertaken during the year except in Surat, where the Vejalpor nursery was fenced and some enclosures for stacking bamboos made at the Wághai Depôt in the Dángs. A few necessary repairs were executed in all divisions. The total expenditure amounted to :—

			Rs.	a.	p.
West Thána	...	...	152	3	0
East Thána	...	...	94	0	0
Surat	...	...	707	0	6
Panch Maháls	...	...	21	15	4
Total	...	...	975	2	10